

PRESS RELEASE¹

Scottish legal history will be made in Edinburgh on Thursday (24th September) when retired shipwright Pat McCrystal arrives in court. Millions of British viewers became aware of his plight recently when a BBC2 Newsnight devoted much of its programme to his story. This highlighted the drastic financial effect that the death of a Scottish asbestos victim has on damages. Under Scots Law a major proportion of the settlement dies with the victim. At present Lord McAulay is pursuing a bill through the Lords in relation to this. Ex-Clydeside worker Mr McCrystal is suffering the terminal illness mesothelioma which can only be caught by asbestos exposure. He was given four months to live back in August. No Scottish victim of mesothelioma has ever made it into court before. It appears that in this singular instance a form of 'fast-track' process has taken place.

The Glasgow area is one of the 'black spots' on the world map of asbestos-related diseases. Current estimates put the rate of mesothelioma victims at 7.4 times higher than the U.K. average. Informed sources reckon this is only the 'official' figure, that due to a failure to diagnose the real figure will be much higher. There are many myths surrounding asbestos disease. One is that only asbestos-workers are at risk. This is simply not true. People from different walks of life are contracting these incurable asbestos-related diseases, many in their thirties and early forties. Mr McCrystal is one of more than 20,000 Clydeside shipyard workers contaminated by the deadly dust since the end of the 2nd World War.

There are different reasons for the lengthy delays in the judicial process. Civil actions take anything from 1 to 7 years. Some argue that delays are used to obstruct proper compensation payments to asbestos victims. The hard truth is that so many of these people will be dead long before the law finally runs its course. The vast majority will have settled for 'out-of-court' payments which this charity would describe as wholly inadequate.

¹ The public should be aware that it isn't only industrial workers who are exposed to asbestos. A Glasgow woman who died of mesothelioma some months ago was a primary schoolteacher and there is overwhelming evidence to indicate that she caught this deadly disease while working in Glasgow schools. Less than a month ago workers were discovered removing asbestos from a Drumchapel school without adequate precautions and lumps of asbestos were found littering the school playground.

Pat McCrystal's case is seen as a test-case by Clydeside Action on Asbestos, and will allow public recognition of the struggle for justice being faced by terminal victims of asbestos-related disease. Glasgow is described as 'cancer capital' of the world but those campaigning against asbestos are adamant that a proper study of the direct link to asbestos seems never to have been carried out. It needs to be stated loudly and clearly that 80% of asbestos-induced terminal cancers are not mesotheliomas but lung cancers.

When Pat McCrystal arrives in Parliament Square he will be greeted by many disabled victims of asbestos. Other members of Clydeside Action on Asbestos will be unable to make the trip, they are severely ill, some like Mr McCrystal are terminal. The group reckons on average three of their members die every month. Their motto is 'justice for the living - remember the dead'. They are calling for a global ban on asbestos and national recognition of the horrific reality of asbestos-related disease. So many people are dying and so little is being done. It seems that this country cannot cope with the enormity of what is essentially a man-made disaster. Clydeside Action on Asbestos accuses the asbestos industry of having "acted with reckless indifference" to the safety of its workers, and, by implication, the safety of the public at large.

Pat McCrystal is a courageous man. He has stated that his only reason for pursuing this claim through the court is to highlight the horrific plight of Scottish victims of asbestos. The hearing is due for Thursday morning; victim-members of Clydeside Action on Asbestos will be at Parliament Square, Edinburgh from 9.15 a.m.

Contact the office directly for further information.